

West Hartford Substance Abuse Prevention Commission (SAPC)
Meeting Minutes
June 2, 2016

Attendees: Jeff Bersin - Chair, Joanna Curry-Sartori – Bridge Family Center, Joe Kalache – Human Services, Dan Jordan - ICR, Cyndi Brown - COC, Michaela Porter- covering WH for Courant, Rebecca Burke - UConn, Helen Drohan, Jean Schashal- ICR, Ben Grippo - Hartford Dispensary, Alec Hall - Riverbank House, Jamal Hines – Conard HS.

Welcome / Introductions / Approve Minutes / Early Departures / Announcements/Refreshments

Approve minutes- motion to approve
Send off minutes

Announcements:

- After ten years as a member and eight years as Chair, Jeff Bersin will be stepping down from the West Hartford Substance Abuse Prevention Commission. Cyndi Brown will assume the Chair for SAPC, officially starting Sept 2016.
- Checks sent from SAPC for High school safe grad parties
- Celebrate WH is this weekend- Bridge Booth, LBE has booth.

General Discussion

COC Updates: Discussion about bringing Chris Herren to WHPS.

- Both Conard and Hall want Chris Herren to come.
- Parents say now is the time to come together and address the issue of prescription drug abuse. The window is “open”.
- Chris would agree do the evening for \$5000 plus travel. He could come in January.
- It could be covered if payed for by SAPC and PTOs combined.
- It needs to be discussion with entire SAPC group.
- Can we charge admissions or ask for donations?
- If say the event is sponsored by commission, or grant.
- (Jamahl, Conard Asst. Principal gave context for who Chris H. is) Chris Herren is a former NBA star. He came from family of great athletes and had pressure to succeed. The family had a culture of drugs, alcohol, etc. A coach brought Chris in to the team and supported him. Still, he struggled with addictions. He was put on pro teams, like Celtics. Eventually he reached his low. He wrote the book "Basketball Junkie". Teachers at Conard teach this book and think it would have a powerful impact to meet the book author. It is integral in their on-going curriculum so it is not a one shot deal.
- (Chris came to WH a few years ago) Before when Chris came it wasn't a joint effort. Now the town is more unified and it would be a town building endeavor. All can benefit. He is a powerful speaker. This is a way to galvanize our efforts- to get people to start talking about an issue that is scary to talk about. He is very real, authentic, and puts his heart and soul into this. He brings every one into the story.
- Both High School principals have told Cyndi they would like to see this happen.
- We discussed where to host the event so it could be inviting for everyone from both high schools and the whole town.

- Consider giving extra credit to students who attend the presentation.
- Cyndi- will find out if HALL can study the book (in the way that Conard is studying it).
- Cyndi will research the best venue- Conard, Town Hall, etc.
- Jean--- use manual to do town hall event. Best to have event as part of a larger strategy, part of curriculum, part of town wide effort.
- Others agreed saying how this ties in the study of his book.
- Questions asked of Joe re funding from SAPC. He said it was probable but depends on state funding. Haven't heard of changes to funding at this point. Joe said decision if we bring Chris is decision of the commissions as a whole.
- Group was asked if they wanted to bring Chris Herran. All agreed. No one disagreed with the proposal.
- Cyndi- next step- see can each PTO do \$2000?

Stories: Professionals in the field who are addicts in recovery

Alec- 23 yrs old. From Waterbury

- He got into drugs freshman year of high school.
- He had good grades and was quiet so people did not know what inside- he was nervous.
- When he was 14, he had family issues. That was enough of an excuse. He made one friend that gave him drugs. He had a predisposition – there was alcoholism in family.
- Start with weed. He realized he felt "one joint below normal". It helped him be happy, speak up, be confident. Gave incentive.
- Within 6 - 7 months, met not good crowd who did harder drugs. Then he was introduced to Oxy –it helped and gave him energy.
- He continued to do pretty well with school until Junior year.
- His drug of choice- anything that made him feel better. He got into selling. All the while he was class president.
- In senior year he got caught and was requested to leave his school.
- He thought he didn't have problem and he would lay low.
- No one told him family history- the death of his uncle from drug use. It was covered.
- He went to college and thought if he could escape the scene from home then he would be OK.
- At school he got depressed and so left school. Then he was introduced to heroin.
- He attended 3 - 4 different schools and the same pattern would happen.
- He went thru money, thru jobs and owed money.
- He told his parents who sent him to detox on and off over 3-4 yrs.
- When sent to the recovery house, he was asked if wanted to be happy. No one had ever asked this question.
- He ended up there for long term, did 12 steps, and felt understood by someone else telling piece of story (those running the recovery house were also in recovery so could relate).
- Now he works in recovery and travels to tell his story, to help himself by helping someone else.
- LT treatment for recovery is essential. 28 days just won't heal years of abuse. He advocates a LT stay to really impact life and behavior. Min he would say is 5 -6 months to see more progress.

Ben – 38 yrs

- As a child he was in special ed – there were good people who worked with him but they didn't really understand his need. Overall family was good though some challenges, like when mom had a heart attack. He was predisposed as there was substance abuse in the family.
- (If only he had Junky uncle maybe he wouldn't go down the route he did).
- Pot led to cocaine and heroin intravenous use for 8 years.
- Then in 2005 work up and there was nothing left to sell in house.
- Ok, he thought, this is probably rock bottom.
- He walked into St. Francis ER and asked for rehab. Once he said he was on methadone they said they wouldn't take him and discharged him the next morning.
- So he went back and said he was suicidal so they would keep him. This brought in his parents.
- Mom researched all rehab places.
- Went for 4 weeks. At the end of the month someone asked if he really wanted to change and when he said yes referred him for LT treatment.
- Went to LT for 8 month.
- After this he went to a shelter for 2 -3 months and then found job.
- He had lost all his friends when he was using. He got all friends back after he was sober.
- Now 8 years sober.
- Now got his undergrad degree and is working on Masters at CCSU in counseling department.
- He work at Hartford Dispensary. He speaks on panels training medical docs and others.
- He has never had a chance to speak to kids but would love to - to scare them.
- He has 75 patients right now. He especially tries to have a different talk with 21 - 25 year olds.

Discussion about --- what works for prevention, what could someone have said to you, what was the root cause of using?

- I wanted to remove myself from how I was feeling.
- If people had understood Ben's learning disability better at the time that would have made a huge difference.
- Also if there had been more hands on teachers, knowing what kids had families with a history (substance abuse) and give them special attention.
- DARE program- made me more curious. But if I had been told what would happen- concrete facts of the effects of drugs on your body and life – that would have been effective. Also would have been powerful to see pictures of people at their worst when using.
- The issue is propaganda gets mixed with the facts- so then kids stop listening.
- Don't blow out it out of proportion.
- Say the degree of danger of different drugs.
- In my 9th grade health class, they showed pics of people with STDs and it freaked me out so I always used protection. There needs to be pics of drugs and facts, and what it looks like.
- Ideally we would have an actual class eg. The biology of addiction. Don't dumb it down. For middle school or HS, it doesn't need to be the whole year but they need to hear horror stories.
- They would want to talk to kids who are old enough to know someone who is using.

- Very honest, practical but really real!
- Curriculum is huge. Even if monthly... Needs a constant reminder. Monthly speaker, or at advisory.
- Pay attention to kids who have predisposition.
- Maybe there are underlying issues to address – anxiety, wanting confidence, social issues, etc.
- For those with issues, promote LT programs- Consistency, and constant reinforcement, build skills, limit access to lifestyle.

ICR- spoke of grant application (Jean S.)

- ICR is applying for a grant that is for Planning- to assess community needs, put together plan, build capacity, and ID resources to address prescription drug abuse . The grant is an opportunity to move forward. We have until June 15th to put it together.
- If we want this to happen, we need to come together and have a meeting.
- Jean will ask Dan - send out Google calendar question to people interested in being in this discussion to find time for planning to get input of key stakeholders.

New Business

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Joanna Curry-Sartori, LMFT

June 2016

